2013

Think, Feel, Act

Lessons from Research about Young Children

Ontario

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Une publication équivalente est disponible en français sous le titre suivant : *Penser, sentir, agir : Leçons tirées de la recherche sur la petite enfance*, 2013.
This publication is also available on the Ministry of Education's website, at www.ontario.ca/edu.

Introduction

The Ministry of Education is committed to supporting early years settings in providing high quality early learning and development opportunities for children across Ontario. The *Ontario Early Years Policy Framework* describes how high quality programs have an extraordinary and long-lasting impact on children's development, and therefore we want to do everything we can to support educators in their continuous professional learning.

The Ministry has worked with leading experts in the field of early childhood education to develop six research briefs for educators working in early years settings.

We are pleased to present these briefs, which highlight the latest research in early childhood development, strategies to put the key ideas into practice and reflective questions for educators. You will notice a common thread throughout the briefs: a view of the child as competent, capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential.

These briefs are intended to challenge the status quo and encourage critical reflection as we consider our work from different perspectives. As 'briefs', the documents are not intended to provide an in-depth analysis of each topic, but instead we hope to pique your interest and highlight key ideas that are useful and relevant to your work. We encourage you to use the reflective questions throughout the briefs to stimulate personal reflection and team discussions. We also invite you to try out some of the suggested practices and exchange ideas with your colleagues.

Above all, we hope to get people talking about some of the big ideas that have such a significant impact on the experiences of children across the province.

Thank you for everything that you do for the children of Ontario.

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Dr. Jean Clinton is an Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neuroscience at McMaster University, division of Child Psychiatry. She is on staff at McMaster Children's Hospital, an Associate in the Department of Family Medicine at McMaster, an Associate in the Department of Child Psychiatry, University of Toronto and SickKids Hospital, and an Associate Member of the Offord Centre for Child Studies. She was also a founding Board member and Fellow of Fraser Mustard's Council for Early Child Development, and has authored many papers on early child development and poverty, infant neglect, children's mental health, resilience and brain development.

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Anne Marie Coughlin is the Professional Development Coordinator and Program Director at London Bridge Child Care Services in London, Ontario. Over her 25-year career, she has been a Preschool Educator, Centre Director, Professional Development Coordinator, and Community College Instructor. She is also currently the Provincial Director for the Canadian Association for Young Children. She regularly develops and facilitates workshops and training sessions and presents at conferences, colleges, community events, and professional associations on topics ranging from curriculum and leadership development to personal wellness.

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Dr. Stuart Shanker is a Distinguished Research Professor of Philosophy and Psychology at York University and Director of the Milton and Ethel Harris Research Initiative. He has received numerous awards for his research, and has authored many articles and books on the topics of self-regulation, human development and philosophy. He also served as Director of the Council for Human Development for ten years, Director of the Canada-Cuba Research Alliance for six years, and was President of the Council of Early Child Development in Canada for two years. He is currently helping to roll out the Canadian Self-Regulation Initiative.

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Dr. Carol Anne Wien is a Professor in the Faculty of Education at York University, specializing in the area of early childhood education. She has authored numerous publications and led many professional learning opportunities on the subjects of pedagogical documentation, emergent curriculum and Reggio-inspired practice. She began her career as a high school teacher and Montessori-trained preschool teacher working in schools in Ithaca, NY, London, ON and Halifax, NS.

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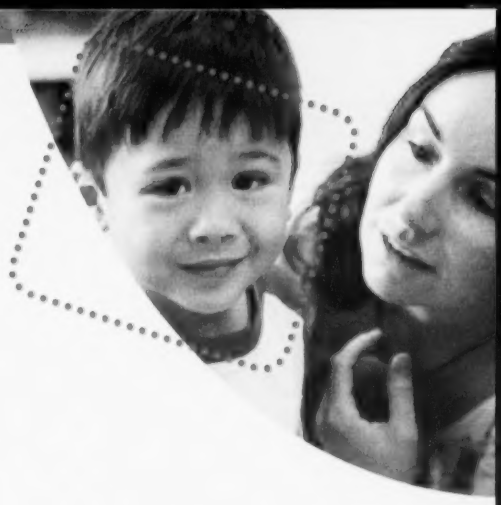

The Power of Positive Adult Child Relationships: Connection Is the Key

Written by Dr. Jean Clinton

McMaster University

Connection Is the Key

As you begin this article, think about what it means to make a "connection" to another, and think about the strong connections you have with the children in your care. In our hearts and minds we are likely to feel connected to those we spend our days with, but routinely, we may find ourselves spending more time on *Correcting and Directing*, leaving little time for *Connecting*. On a daily basis, what is your C:D:C *Ratio?*

The Connection to Learning

How do children learn? For many years, the focus in research has been on how children learn to think and how they develop language and communication skills. Much less research has investigated how children learn to feel and express emotions, and how they develop the ability to become the "boss" of those feelings. This ability to manage emotions is part of self-regulation (see Dr. Shanker's research brief on self-regulation). It is strange to consider now, but for a long time emotional development was considered unimportant, secondary to "higher order" functions such as reason (Damasio, 1994). We know now that all areas are interconnected and developing together – emotions, language, thinking – rendering it ineffective to focus on one area without the others.

Children learn best in an environment that acknowledges this interconnectivity and thus focuses on both emotional and cognitive development. There is now an explosion of knowledge that tells us that healthy development cannot happen without good relationships between children and the important people in their lives, both within

the family and outside of it. As Dr. Jack Shonkoff states, "young children experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect virtually every aspect of their development" (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). Relationships are the active ingredient in healthy development, especially brain development.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a term used to describe the process through which children (and adults) develop skills to support their success in learning, forming good relationships, solving problems, and adapting to new situations - skills such as self-awareness, self-control, the ability to work cooperatively with others and to be caring and empathetic (Goleman, 2006).

Social and Emotional Learning

How do children learn about the world? Babies are born learning. When they interact with others, babies are like little scientists, observing faces and gestures and noticing everything around them. Dr. Andy Meltzoff has shown that babies as young as one month begin to imitate faces (Meltzoff, 1977). By one year of age they turn to see mom's reaction when they are shown something new— "If there's a smile, they'll crawl forward to investigate; if there's horror, they'll stop dead in their tracks" (Gopnik, A., Meltzoff, A. N. & Kuhl, P., 2008, p. 33). They learn to soothe themselves by being soothed. It's a two way street of serve and return (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). We are wired to connect to others.

Infant, Toddler and Preschooler's World

This holds true for other age groups as well. The world of infants, toddlers and preschoolers is one of extraordinary brain activity and learning. We all learn by observing others and we seek connection and relationship. Our brain is a social organ – wired to reach out and help others. Why is that so – likely for survival. Our babies and young children need far more protection than other mammals. A couple of very interesting experiments illustrate that we start to show empathy and a desire to help very early in life. Dr. Karen Wynn's research at Yale is fascinating. She has 6-month-old babies watch animated circles and squares or puppets act out a mini drama. Some help a little character up a hill, some push him down. When given the choice to play with either puppet, most babies prefer the helper (Bloom, 2010). In another experiment, an adult tries to put books in a cupboard but instead of opening it he just keeps banging against it. The 18-month-old children in the study spontaneously come and open the cupboard for him. He never looked at them for help, they just knew. How? From all of the observing and relationship cues they had been receiving and responding to all their lives (Warneken & Tomasello, 2009).

Implications for Caregivers and Early Childhood Educators

What implications are there for caring for young children? A lot depends on what our mindset is and how we view our role. What do we understand our job to be? What we *think*, affects how we *feel*, affects how we *act*. For example, if we think that our job is to teach children all we can, so that they learn their numbers and letters and how to behave, then we may *feel* that kids need to do lots of things to learn and keep busy. We may *act* by setting up a program that mainly consists of adults directing the children through activities. This is concerning for several reasons. An adult-led emphasis on literacy and numeracy means other things need to be left out and what too often gets left out are the opportunities for learning through play.

As the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) so clearly states:

"Experts recognize that play and academic work are not distinct categories for young children: creating, doing, and learning are inextricably linked. When children are engaged in purposeful play, they are discovering, creating, improvising, and expanding their learning. Viewing children as active participants in their own development and learning allows educators to move beyond preconceived expectations about what children should be learning, and focus on what they are learning" (CMEC, 2012).

In reflecting on this, some very well-meaning early learning centres noted they had been putting children through many transitions in the day, in one example, as many as 19. The challenge is, how can you build relationships with children if you are always interrupting their work, directing them to the new activity or routine, and correcting them if they don't follow your expectations for following the schedule? In contrast, among a growing number of early learning and child care programs, fostering relationships with the children is a top priority. They feel that children learn best in an environment that focuses on relationships, and that if kids are strongly connected to their teachers they will learn more and have less challenging behaviours. They think through the lens of "how will this affect our relationships with the children". They look at how many transitions children go through and work to reduce transitions, and allow lengthy blocks of time where they can be connecting with the children through individualized care and play (Ministry of Education, 2007).

For babies and children, care and teaching are inseparable. By *thinking* differently about learning, that is, not as skills and information taught through direction, but rather as a life-long process ignited by connection, we can *feel* confident that learning is underway as we inter*act* in a warm and responsive manner. With more connection, there is less need for correction and directing. When we truly follow what children are engaged in, we have to connect more with the child and things go more easily for all.

Simple Ways to Build Connections

Things we can do are simple, but we need to make them more intentional. Here are some examples of ways to build connections modified from the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (Ostrosky, M. M. & Jung, E. Y., 2010):

- Be at the child's level for face-to-face interactions
- Use a pleasant, calm voice and simple language while making eye contact
- Provide warm, responsive physical contact
- Follow the child's lead and interest during play
- Help children understand your expectations by providing simple but clear explanations (not by directing)
- Take the time to engage children in the process of resolving problems and conflicts, rather than reiterating classroom rules
- When children's behavior is challenging and disruptive, think about where and how they might have more success and redirect them there
- Foster thoughtfulness and caring by listening to children and by encouraging them to listen to others and share ideas
- Be genuine in acknowledging children for their accomplishments and effort by clearly saying what it is they have done well

Beyond these specific strategies, adults can speed up the process of relationship-building by:

- Carefully analyzing each compliance task (e.g., "time to go to paints") and shifting that compliance task to a choice for children (e.g., "Do you want to paint or do puzzles?"); and
- Carefully considering if some forms of "challenging" behavior can be ignored (e.g., loud voice)—this is not ignoring behavior designed to elicit attention but ignoring in the sense of making wise and limited choices about when to pick battles over behaviour.

When there is more connection, there is less need for correction and directing.

As you can probably see by now, this shift in mindset naturally makes the C:D:C ratio better. As the connection goes up, the other C and D go down.

Beware of the "Praise Trap"

It is important to reinforce when children have done well and worked hard. Reinforcing this by saying "you really worked hard on that puzzle, didn't you" or "I see you've collected all of the cars and put in them in the basket, that's wonderful Jack!" is much more informative than "good job tidying" or "you are so smart."

The first type of praise encourages the child and fosters motivation from within (intrinsic motivation), whereas the second type of praise can lead to children looking for reward or praise which typically means they work less (extrinsic motivation).

What About School-Aged Children?

What about school-aged children? The research shows the same results. Children's relationships with others are what matter most. Children who are attuned to the adults in their lives value their approval (Ostrosky, M. M. & Jung, E. Y., 2010). In school-age programs it is key to develop this focus right from the start. Too often, when a group comes together, the first thing we do is go over the rules. What does that set up in terms of relationship expectations for the children? Will they start off by seeing you as environment managers (rule keepers) or relationship partners? What would it be like if the first interactions are seen through the lens of relationship building? We can ask children about themselves, what they like to do, what gets them really excited.

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning at Vanderbilt University (www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel) has a wonderful concept. They use a metaphor of a piggy bank for building positive relationships. They believe that "whenever teachers and caregivers engage in strategies to build positive relationships, it is as if they are making a deposit in a child's relationship piggy bank" and the best way to do this is by "embedding them throughout the day" (Joseph, G. & Strain, P. S., 2004).

Remember Our Goals

What is our goal in raising and working with young children? There are many views and many voices, but clearly we are learning that the quality of children's relationships with the adults in their life has a huge lifelong impact. In fact, evidence is accumulating that when there is an emphasis on social and emotional learning, with a special focus on positive adult-child interactions, children and young people do well.

Durlak, in his large meta-analysis of social and emotional learning showed "that students who receive social and emotional learning instruction had more positive attitudes about school and improved an average of 11 percentile points on standardized achievement tests compared to students who did not receive such instruction" (Durlak et al., 2011). And perhaps even more important for life skills, "it helps students become good communicators, cooperative members of a team, effective leaders, and caring, concerned members of their communities. It teaches them how to set and achieve goals and how to persist in the face of challenges" (Durlak et al., 2011). Who could disagree?

Reflective Questions:

1. In this article the words *kind*, *caring*, *empathetic*, *warm*, *responsive* and *calm* have been used to describe the style of interactions that build connections. Think about these words in relation to the character traits you value in yourself and others. How might you modify your teaching style to foster development of these traits in the children you care for?
2. Would you enjoy your day more if you had more time for connecting with individual children or very small groups in play? Think about how you can change your daily schedule to do so.

3. As you think about this article, what would you consider an ideal Correction: Direction: Connection ratio? 1:2:200? There is no perfect answer but even just observing yourself for a day will begin an important reflection.
4. Will you share this article with parents and co-workers?

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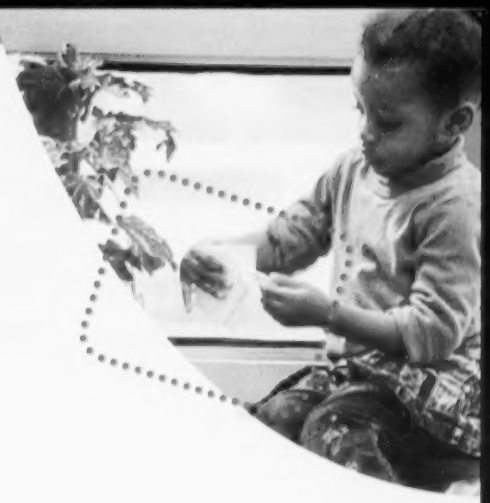

The Environment Is a Teacher

Written by Karyn Callaghan

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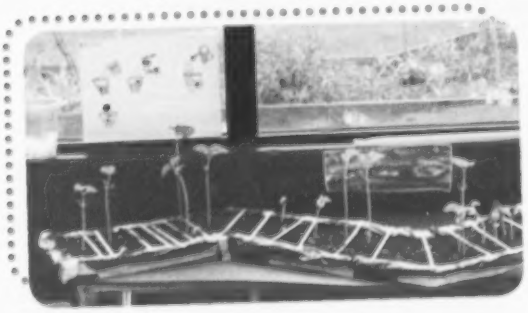
The Environment Is a Teacher

Space speaks. Architects and designers know this; young children know it too. Every day, they are reading the environments through which they navigate. The environment is a teacher. When we can read its many layers as children do, we can use it as an ally. "Beauty is the voice that calls the child to engage with the materials and elevates him to a higher level of grace and courtesy as he interacts in his environment" (Haskins, 2012, p.34). How do educators design classrooms so that they have a cohesive sensibility and rationale for decisions about the environment?



In educational discourse, the word "environment" usually refers to the physical environment, inside and outside. It will serve us well if we can expand this perception to include the context in general, including the relationships among the people and between them and the materials, the rules, the schedule. These contexts should be co-constructed by the adults and children because the impact on everyone is tangible.

View of the Child

A starting point for critical reflection is a clear statement of how we view children. If we posted our view of the child in large letters in our classrooms, we could invite collaboration as we work to bring our practice into alignment with those stated views.

If, for example, we believe that children are part of our community and their voices should be heard in decisions that affect them (in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), their input should be sought and considered in decisions about the classroom environment. They figuratively and quite literally have a different perspective than the adults in the room.

The Ontario Early Years Policy Framework presents a view of the child as competent, curious, and capable of complex thinking. If we embrace this view, and see children as able communicators, collaborators and meaning-makers who are forming relationships every day with people and materials, who are capable of empathy, whimsy, sensitivity and joy, how would the classroom reflect this? A lack of clutter, and thoughtfully organized, aesthetically rich open-ended materials invite the children to make relationships, and to communicate their ideas in many ways. Pedagogical documentation, strategically located, prompts expansion on ideas, complexity, and reflection.

> "Children are a laboratory for the senses with each sense activating other senses... As a result, the child's environment cannot be seen just as a context for learning or a passive setting for activities; it is an integral part of learning and helps define their identity"
>
> *(Zini, as cited in Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012, p. 319).*

Children can best create meaning through living in environments which support "complex, varied, sustained, and changing relationships between people, the world of experience, ideas and the many ways of expressing ideas" (Cadwell, 1997, p.93). It is not merely a matter of decorating. The arrangements of materials should invite engagement, meaning-making, and exploration. Thinking of "aesthetic" as being the opposite of "anaesthetic", a shutting down of the senses, may help with appraising the environment in a richer way. Ann Lewin-Benham (2011) has suggestions for engaging in a process of transformation of classroom aesthetics.

Safety

Many decisions about environments for learning are based on concern about safety and ease of disinfecting, rather than concern about the need to provide a stimulating environment that promotes exploration and inquiry.

Educators who have engaged in critical reflection about how their view of children was evidenced in their rules, found that there were contradictions to be addressed (Wien, 2004). After articulating a view of children as competent, these educators realized they had so many rules to govern children's behaviour that a significant number of their interactions each day were devoted to policing. The justification for most of those rules related to concern about the children's safety, fearing that without these rules, children would suffer injuries. The educators were delighted to discover that reducing rules actually resulted in fewer accidents. The children started to assess the hazards that could arise in their activities and take steps to ensure their own safety. This freed up the

educators to spend more time engaged in dialogue and documentation of the children's activity. These knowledgeable, responsive early childhood educators created a better environment, consistent with the Early Learning Framework's view of their role.

If our environments are designed to eliminate all risk by not allowing access to breakable items or physical challenges, how can children learn to exercise self-control and become aware of their own actions? Children can be supported to develop relationships with materials that call upon them to be mindful and respectful, when they are given the opportunity to learn to be responsible for their own safety, and to care for their environment (Gambetti, 2002). It is worth the significant investment of thought and time required to introduce these materials and organize them in ways that provide visibility and access, invite investigation and respect, and contribute to the aesthetic beauty of the setting.

Diversity

Creating an environment that acknowledges and values diversity, where young children can ask questions about gender, physical abilities, 'race' and ethnicity, is also important (Green, 2001). "As children play with familiar objects that give them a sense of belonging, as well as unfamiliar objects that represent different lifestyles, they learn that all children and families make music, dress, eat, and spend time in activities. This awareness can lead to developing a true respect for cultural diversity" (Kirmani, 2007, p.97). Looking critically at our approach to decorating for themes and holidays would be a significant step toward a more meaningful approach to planning our environments. The commercialism of traditional holidays can be downplayed so they do not become the focus of the curriculum. The huge amount of time that is traditionally devoted to decorating for themes and holidays, which are often difficult to celebrate in inclusive ways, can be avoided (Green, 2001, p.22). Educators should work to ensure relevance and connection between the classroom and the lives / family life of the children. As indicated in the Early Learning Framework, forming partnerships with families and communities strengthens the ability of early childhood settings to respect the capabilities and sensibilities of young children, while respecting diversity, equity and inclusion are required for honouring children's rights, optimal development and learning.

Time

The schedule is often the elephant in the room. This element of the context is served at the expense of responsiveness, focus and joy. When the teachers in one classroom were challenged by their supervisor to eliminate all watches and clocks, they had to collaborate with the children to gauge when to change activities, go outside, have a snack, extend

an exploration. Wien and Kirby-Smith (1998) describe how this provocation supported thoughtful consideration of how the schedule can be made to serve children and educators. The experience was liberating.

Goals

Co-constructing these rich, complex contexts for early education requires reflection and collaboration; it is professional work to be engaged in by educators who see themselves as researchers. There cannot be a recipe for this thoughtful, responsive work. "Each situation, from lunch to getting ready for nap time, can be a moment of research, because all of that constitutes an increased attention to the environment, to the preparation of materials, and to the contexts for research" (Gandini, 2005, p.65). There are several other aspects to consider: the relationship between indoors and outdoors; the sustainability and transformability of our choices of materials; the use of light; the soundscape.

Educators can choose an entry point for co-constructing meaningful contexts for engagement. One way to begin is to use photographs and documentation to reflect with colleagues what every part of the environment communicates. Colleagues may tackle one corner at a time and strip it down so it can be reconstructed to reflect the view of the child that they wish to embrace (Wien, Coates, Keating, Bigelow, 2005). Children and parents can be invited to participate in this process. Educators who observe, document, and reflect on children's engagement with the environment become partners in learning with the children.

Questions to Guide Reflection and Decisions

- How well does each part of the environment invite investigation, lingering, conversation and collaboration?
- Are children's words and work visible in the environment in a way that communicates respect and value for their meaning-making and communication?
- How well does the environment "challenge children aesthetically to respond deeply to the natural world, their cultural heritage, or to their inner world" (Tarr, 2001)?
- To what extent are children able to discover and develop their capabilities through reasonable risk-taking?
- Does the schedule support thoughtful, sustained engagement with ideas, materials, and friends?
- What can we learn from how children respond to the life, materials and events in their environment?

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Pedagogical Leadership

Written by Anne Marie Coughlin & Lorrie Baird

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Over the past decade, there has been considerable interest in the importance of leadership in the area of early learning. We have come to understand that the most important work a leader in this field can do is to support and promote quality early learning environments for children. Beyond administrative leadership, this requires pedagogical leadership.

Pedagogy can be defined as the understanding of how learning takes place and the philosophy and practice that supports that understanding of learning. Essentially it is the study of the teaching and learning process. Leadership is often defined as the act of leading or guiding individuals or groups. If we are to combine these two we are offered the notion of pedagogical leadership as leading or guiding the study of the teaching and learning process.

The field of early childhood education and care has had a growing interest in pedagogical leadership rising from the need to increase quality and influence organizational change (Andrews, 2009). Any person who has a deep understanding of early learning and development may take on the role of the pedagogical leader. These individuals see themselves as partners, facilitators, observers and co-learners along side educators, children and families. Most importantly, pedagogical leaders challenge others to see themselves as researchers in the teaching and learning process. In turn, this practice builds a culture of reflective teaching that helps us to sort through the complexities of our work.

Pedagogical leadership requires us to rethink the way we work and learn together with other adults. We know that growth and development takes time. Like children, adults learn best when they are interested and engaged. The pedagogical leader nurtures dispositions that are useful for educators in their day-to-day practice. Dispositions such as curiosity, openness, resiliency and purposefulness help to create a culture where there

is less focus on teaching and more on how learning takes place for both the child and the adult.

In order to do this, pedagogical leaders ensure that educators have time and methods to reflect on their own practice, study children and explore multiple perspectives. They ask questions that engage educators both intellectually and emotionally and require the consideration of how theory informs practice and practice informs theory.

A pedagogical leader can use the idea of asking questions to inspire themselves and others to develop intentional practices that bring to life the six guiding principles of the Early Learning Framework. Questions like:

1. How do we give visibility to the competencies and contributions of young children in a way that challenges us to move beyond traditional checklists?
2. How do we deepen engagement with families as partners in their children's learning?
3. How do we value, promote and celebrate respect for diversity, equity and inclusion?
4. How do we engage educators in thinking about environments, experiences and the daily life of the classroom in ways that will challenge and meet up with children's lively minds?
5. How do we study and articulate play and inquiry as learning?
6. How do we develop a culture of reflective practice so that professional development happens day after day in the classroom as we work with children and each other?

These types of questions can help both leaders and educators to make connections between their own practice and the kind of learning community that they want to nurture.

Part of the role of the pedagogical leader is to create systems and structures that support the values and vision they have for growing a quality learning environment. Decisions that are made around how to spend money, organize time, set up environments and support the success of others come from the greater vision that they have for children, families and themselves.

The following four principles help pedagogical leaders build an intentional culture where reflection and inquiry form the foundation for transforming practice:

1. Use a Protocol to Support Reflective Thinking and Inquiry

Educators regularly use protocols to guide them through day to day practices. Whether it is for hand washing, diaper changing, reporting accidents or keeping us safe, protocols offer a systematic way to perform a task. While protocols are useful in guiding us through custodial routines, they are also an extremely valuable tool in supporting a disciplined approach to reflection and inquiry. It encompasses a set of key questions that encourage us to consider multiple perspectives and helps to deepen understanding and influence our daily practice.

Individuals can construct their own set of reflective questions to focus dialogue by using the principles of the Early Learning Framework or other reflective tools.

Practical Application: Use a Reflective Protocol to Study Environments

Environments set the foundation for learning and have a strong influence on how we think and behave. Studying environments together in a thoughtful way can help educators and pedagogical leaders to be more intentional about how they construct and design spaces for young children.

Provide an opportunity for educators to visit and study each other's learning environments. Use a series of questions as a way to focus observations and support in-depth follow up discussions.

The principles of Ontario's Early Learning Framework can provide inspiration for framing questions such as:

- Where do you see examples of children's strengths and competencies?
- Where do you notice evidence of family engagement?
- How does this space help you to know more about the thinking, interests and personalities of the individuals who spend their day here?
- Are the children's voices present even when they are not in the room?
- How are relationships supported in this space?
- What do you notice about how materials are organized and offered here?
- Where is the educator's thinking visible?

2. Set Up Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities are groups of individuals that come together over time with shared interests and passions to engage in the process of collective and collaborative learning. Learning communities are grounded in a social constructivist approach to learning, recognizing that individuals build knowledge through their interactions with others (Wenger, 1998). To be most effective, learning communities require a facilitator. Facilitators help to guide dialogue, ensure that equal voices are heard, reflect back or summarize ideas and make connections to values and perspectives. Once a learning community has been established, trust builds, and the facilitator can then evolve the role into both facilitator and "critical or essential friend". The critical friend often provokes new ideas, challenges people's thinking and brings forward new perspectives that may not have been considered (Curtis, Cividanes, Lebo & Carter, 2012). While pedagogical leaders often take on the role of facilitator or critical friend within these communities, the groups are made up of people from all levels of an organization and its community. The establishment of professional learning communities is one of the most powerful staff development strategies we have to build capacity in others and shift our focus from teaching to learning. They offer us a way to grow relationships and study together the complexities of both child and adult learning.

Practical Application: Set up Book or Article Studies

Select a book or series of articles of interest to your community. Invite a group of individuals (this can include both educators and families) to meet over the course of several months, taking time to review and reflect on each chapter or article. Establish your own set of questions as a protocol to guide your discussions.

3. Allow Time

Time is a precious commodity that we must use wisely if we are to build and sustain quality early learning environments for both children and adults.

Too often we try to find quick fixes or use one-off training sessions in the hope that it will inspire change. However, we know in order to make sustainable change and authentically grow practice, educators need time to come together to reflect on the complexities of their daily work. Offering this time moves us beyond the notion of using templates or checklists that often remove thinking and collaboration.

Practical Application: Study Photographs to Discover Children's Strengths and Competencies

Bring a small group together to study a photo of a child or small group of children engaged in a focused activity. This group can consist of educators but can also include families. Facilitate a conversation using the following questions to consider the child's perspective: What do you notice in the child's face or in their reactions? What seems to be capturing the child's attention? What details in the photo show the child's strength and competencies? What might the child be trying to figure out or accomplish? How does considering the child's point of view influence our thinking about this child?

Questions like these serve as a guide for a more focused dialogue and prevent the temptation for conversations to drift off in many different directions.

4. Paralleling Practice

As pedagogical leaders we must create learning experiences for educators that parallel what we want them to offer children. We want educators to foster creativity, create rich learning environments, respect individual learning styles, encourage curiosity, support reasonable risk taking, and provide opportunities for children to think and work together. In order to do this, educators deserve the time and opportunity to engage in rich learning experiences themselves. It is only when they know what that feels like that they can inspire it in others.

Practical Application: Block Party

Set up an opportunity for educators (or educators and families) to explore blocks for themselves in order to develop a deeper understanding of the possibilities and complexities that block building offers. You may choose to offer blocks that connect or standard unit blocks. Present the participants with a group challenge such as building a structure as high as they can or using the blocks to tell a story. As adults begin their encounter, they discover many of the same thrills and challenges that children do. Allow plenty of time for both the play and debrief of the play. De-brief the activity by asking questions such as, what did you discover about blocks that you didn't know before? How did other people influence your play? What problems did you encounter and how did you work through them? How might you compare your experience with the experiences that children have with blocks?

This idea of "playing with materials" can be repeated with any number of other things that are or might be offered to children, such as paint, clay or loose parts.

Just as the principles in the Early Learning Framework act as a guide to orient our practices, pedagogical leaders create a sturdy infrastructure that supports the teaching and learning process. Working together with their learning communities, pedagogical leaders define the vision and values that are central to their program. They challenge and empower educators to see themselves as researchers where they become interpreters rather than mere implementers of a curriculum framework. Pedagogical leaders commit to using practices and allocating resources that build an intentional culture where learning and growing happens in relationship with others. Just as the province continues to invest in their long term vision for children and families, so must we commit to pedagogical leadership. This approach to leadership is not always easy. It takes time and continuous investment. However, when leaders invest in themselves and others around them it can transform practice and build sustainable, high quality programs.

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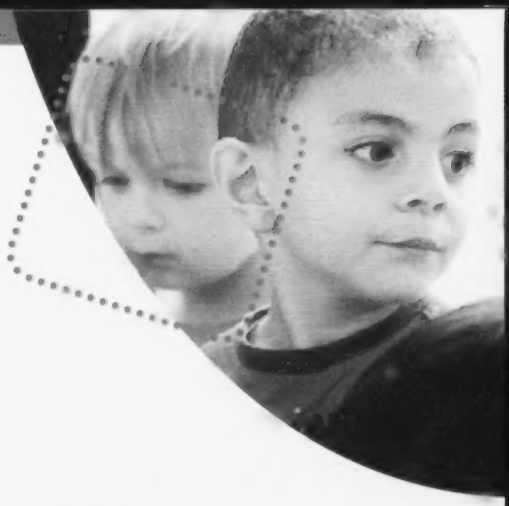

Calm, Alert and Happy

Written by Dr. Stuart Shanker

York University

What Is Self-Regulation?

Just about everywhere you turn these days you come across someone talking about the importance of enhancing children's ability to self-regulate. This is because of a growing number of studies showing that self-regulation lays a foundation for a child's long-term physical, psychological, behavioral, and educational well-being (Shanker, 2012). What isn't quite so clear, however, is what exactly *self-regulation* is, and what sorts of things parents, caregivers and early childhood educators can do to enhance a child's ability to self-regulate.

There is a tendency to think that "self-regulation" is just another way of talking about self-control. We have long seen self-control as a sort of muscle: as having the internal strength to resist an impulse. Self-control is clearly important for children's ability to deal with the tasks and the temptations that they are confronted with every day (Moffitt et al., 2011; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). But *self-regulation* represents a very different way of understanding why a child might be having problems with self-control, and more important, what can be done to help that child.

One of the most common mistakes is to confuse *self-regulation* with *compliance*. A child might behave the way we want because he is afraid of being punished, or solely in order to obtain some coveted award; but this is not at all the same thing as the child who actually *wants* to behave this way, where the consequences of such an attitude for healthy development are profound. Self-regulation has nothing to do with being strong or weak, and to punish a child for a 'lack of self-discipline' when his problem has to do with an over-stretched nervous system risks exacerbating the self-regulatory problems that the child is dealing with.

For a long time the prevailing idea was that you can get a child to do what you want by using punishments and rewards; but the more these behaviour management techniques have been studied the more we've come to recognize that not only is this very draining on the adults who have to play the role of disciplinarian, but, as far as the child is concerned, they often don't work very well and in too many cases they can actually make things worse (Pink, 2011). Self-regulation, on the other hand, represents an attempt to understand the causes of a problematic behavior and then mitigate those causes, rather than simply trying to extinguish the behavior.

In simplest terms, self-regulation refers to how efficiently and effectively a child deals with a stressor and then recovers (Porges, 2011; Lillas & Turnbull, 2009; McEwen, 2002). To deal with a stressor, the brain triggers a sort of gas pedal, the sympathetic nervous system, to produce the energy needed; and then applies a sort of brake, the parasympathetic nervous system, in order to recover. In this way the brain regulates the amount of energy that the child expends on stress so that resources are freed up for other bodily functions, like digestion, cellular repair, maintaining a stable body temperature, or paying attention and learning.

The Development of Self-Regulation

A baby is born with only between 20-25% of her adult brain. At the moment of birth her brain starts to grow at a phenomenal rate, producing approximately 700 new synapses every single second.

In addition to forming connections between all the different sensory and motor systems, the part of the baby's brain that is growing the most is the prefrontal cortex, where the systems that support self-regulation are housed.

Over the past decade, developmental neuroscientists have learned that *it is by being regulated that these robustly growing systems are wired to support self-regulation*. The experiences that promote this process begin immediately. The tactile stimulation that the baby receives when you hold or stroke her release neurohormones that are highly calming; through your voice, your shining eyes, your smiling face, or gently rocking or bouncing your baby when she is fussy, you are laying the foundation for good self-regulation.

The next critical stage in the development of self-regulation is called 'Social Engagement'. This begins long before your baby begins to speak. The more calmly and warmly the caregiver responds to her baby's crying, and the better she reads the cues as to what her baby is feeling or wants, the better she can 'up-regulate' or 'down-regulate' her.

This is a fundamental principle of self-regulation: it is as much about 'arousing' a baby – e.g., energizing her when she is drowsy and it is time to eat or perhaps just play – as it is about calming a baby down when she is agitated or it's time to sleep.

The development of language marks a critical advance in this 'social engagement system'. Now the toddler can tell you what he wants or needs, and it is imperative that we respond

to these communicative overtures – even if only to tell the child that we will come in a moment – in order to help him develop the functional language skills that enhance self-regulation.

When they are young teens, children start to go through a fundamental transition in their self-regulation, needing their parents much less and their peers much more. But not all teens go through this development at the same age or the same rate and, indeed, some may still not have fully mastered this transition until they are young adults. Furthermore, children suffer all sorts of setbacks and regressions in their ability to self-regulate, and in times of acute stress it is not at all unusual to see a child or even a teen revert to the infant stage of needing a parental hug in order to get calm.

The Arousal Continuum

The ability to self-regulate refers to how smoothly a child is able to move up and down through different *arousal states*, which are critical for expending and restoring energy:

↑

Inhibition

1. Asleep
2. Drowsy
3. Hypoalert
4. Calmly focused and Alert
5. Hyperalert
6. Flooded

Activation

↓

When children are calmly focused and alert, they are best able to modulate their emotions; pay attention; ignore distractions; inhibit their impulses; assess the consequences of an action; understand what others are thinking and feeling, and the effects of their own behaviours; or feel empathy for others.

Children's Stress

Over the past two decades, scientists have made a number of important discoveries in regards to children's stress:

1. While some stress is highly motivating, too much stress can have a long-term negative effect.
2. Too many children are dealing with too many stressors in their lives today.
3. We need to develop a much better understanding of the nature of these stressors and how to reduce them.
4. Children need to learn how to identify for themselves when they are becoming agitated and what they can do to return to being calm and focused.

So what exactly are these stressors? We all know that children are under a lot of pressure today and there is a lot of uncertainty in their lives. But scientists have been developing a much broader understanding of *stress*: of the sorts of things that activate the sympathetic nervous system, and just as important, the sorts of things that help a child's recovery.

The five primary sources of stress in children's lives today are:

1. Biological
2. Emotional
3. Cognitive
4. Social
5. Prosocial

Each of these levels influences and is influenced by all the others. So when working on a child's self-regulation we always have to be mindful that we are looking at all five levels, and not simply one or two. For a lot of children, too much noise or visual stimulation or strong smells can be a stressor. For some children, too much junk food or sugar can be a stressor. For far too many children today, not enough sleep or exercise or just playing with other children is a huge stressor. Many children struggle with strong negative emotions, like fear, anger, shame, or sadness. Some children find certain kinds of cognitive challenge very draining. A great many children find group activities stressful. And finally, children can find it very challenging to have to deal with other children's feelings or needs.

The Signs of an Excessive Stress-Load

When we study the above list it starts to become clear that many of the things that might be stressing a child aren't things that we necessarily think of as a stressor. So how can we tell if a child is over-stressed?

For parents, caregivers, and educators, there are a number of signs of when a child is being overloaded by stress. Some of the key ones are when a child:

- has a lot of trouble paying attention, or even responding to his name
- has a lot of trouble doing the simplest things
- is very crabby when he wakes up in the morning, or never seems to be happy during the day

- argues a lot, or seems to want to oppose our wishes, however reasonable these might be
- gets angry a lot, or too angry, or resorts to hurtful words or even violence
- is highly impulsive and easily distracted
- has a great deal of trouble tolerating frustration
- it is difficult for the child to:
  - sit still
  - go to bed
  - think through even the simplest of problems
  - get along with other children
  - have any positive interests
  - turn off the TV or stop playing the video game.

The Three Key Steps to Self-Regulation

1. The first step is to reduce the child's overall stress-level. This can be as simple as making sure the child is well-slept, getting nutritious foods, and lots of exercise; turning off the radio or the TV in the background if we suspect that our child is sensitive to noise; or limiting the amount of time spent on computer or video games if these seem to leave the child agitated. Just going to school can be stressful for a lot of children, and even very simple aids like a disc for their chair at school or a weighted bag for their lap or some playdough to squeeze while doing lessons can be calming.
2. The second step is to become aware of what it feels like to be calmly focused and alert, and what it feels like to be hypo- or hyper-aroused. A large number of Canadian children lack this basic aspect of self-awareness.
3. The third step is to teach children what sorts of things they need to do in order to return to being calmly focused and alert and what sorts of experiences they may need to manage or even avoid.

The world our children are growing up in today is one where self-regulation is becoming ever more critical. But research is now showing that sports, playing a musical instrument, being involved in the arts, yoga, and martial arts like Tae Kwan Do, all provide enormous benefits for self-regulation (Diamond, 2011). Self-regulation is every bit as much about doing all those things that increase a child's energy levels as learning how to deal with situations or stimuli that the child finds very draining.

Questions for Reflection

- What can I do to support children in learning how to self-regulate?
- What can I change in my environment to reduce children's stress levels?
- How can I support children in recognizing when they are under- and over-stimulated?
- How can I help children recognize what sorts of activities help them to become calmly focused and alert and what activities they need to limit?

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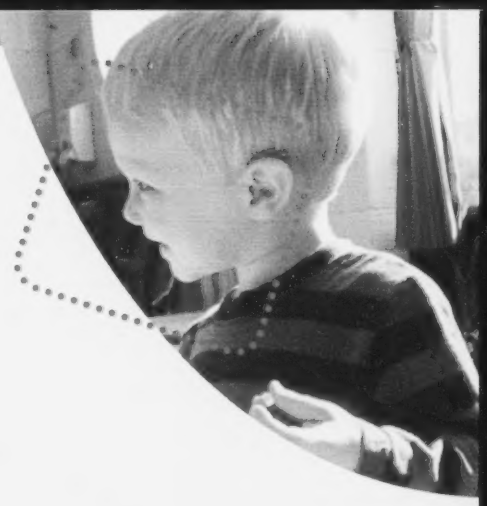
The Canadian Self-Regulation Initiative (CSRI) was launched in the fall of 2012. The goal of this initiative is to embed practices designed to enhance self-regulation in the classroom. A number of schools in British Columbia, Ontario and Yukon are involved in the First Wave of the CSRI. For more information about this initiative, as well as useful tips and practices for parents and educators, go to www.self-regulation.ca.



Making Learning Visible Through Pedagogical Documentation

Written by Dr. Carol Anne Wien

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"Documentation is not about finding answers, but generating questions."

(Filippini in Turner & Wilson, 2010, p. 9)

We have always documented as a society – from cash register slips to medical records, family photo albums to report cards. But pedagogical documentation offers more than a record. It offers a process for listening to children, for creating artifacts from that listening, and for studying with others what children reveal about their competent and thoughtful views of the world. To listen to children, we document living moments with images, video, artifacts, written or audio recordings of what children have said, or other digital traces. These documented traces of lived experience, when shared with others, become a tool for thinking together. To hear others' thoughts makes us realize there are many viewpoints.

Photo credit: Ellen Brown

Pedagogical documentation goes beyond the foundation of the developmental continuum to welcome both children's perspectives and our study of their views. Here, for example, we see a child outside on a playground looking in a window. She has recently moved up from a toddler unit to the preschool room. She sees her former caregiver through the glass and puts her hand up to the window, as does her caregiver, the two of them matching palms, one large and

one small, through the glass. What does this moment tell us about this child's reality, her social and emotional world? What does it tell us about her former caregiver? What does it tell us about the person who took the image? When we lift such moments out of the flow of time, we can hold them still, study them, and consider a thoughtful, caring response.

Pedagogical documentation was developed in the 1970s and 1980s by the educators of the infant-toddler centers and preschools of the municipality of Reggio Emilia in northern Italy and has spread world-wide (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012). It supports educators in both including child development in their view but also looking beyond development to capture broader aspects of experience for reflection. Pedagogical documentation opens us up to relations and meanings that we have not thought to look for: this expansion of what we might learn to know and interpret is its gift to us.

How Pedagogical Documentation Supports Early Childhood Settings

Pedagogical documentation invites us to be curious and to wonder with others about the meaning of events to children. We become co-learners together; focusing on children's expanding understanding of the world as we interpret that understanding with others. We document not merely to record activities, but to placehold events so that we might study and interpret their meaning together. Out of that slowed-down process of teacher research, we have the potential to discover thoughtful, caring, innovative responses that expand our horizons. We discover what we did not yet know how to see. Pedagogical documentation inserts a new phase of thinking and wondering together between the act of observation and the act of planning a response. Rather than looking for what is known through assessment, pedagogical documentation invites the creativity, surprise and delight of educators who discover the worlds of children.

To see children as researchers working with others to make sense of the world, and educators as researchers bringing their curiosity to generate theories about children's social, intellectual, physical, and emotional strategies of communication is to view both children and educators in a new way – as participating citizens engaging their cultural surroundings in their full humanity: this process allows our humanity as thinking, feeling beings a richer place in our life as professional educators.

Learning to Create Pedagogical Documentation

Educators learn new habits of mind in order to document (Wien, Guyevskey & Berdoussis, 2011). The first step is to make documenting a daily habit, in an ongoing process of inquiry. Learning to have the tools we need close at hand can take months of practice. Learning to choose what to document, because we see potential meaning

arising for children, requires practice, judgment and reflection. Here for example, an educator has noticed a boy bringing a pipe over to the bead stringing table. The educator is curious, and snaps a photo and notes these questions: "What does Miles want to know? What does he already know? Is this a place to begin a conversation with Miles about pipes?"

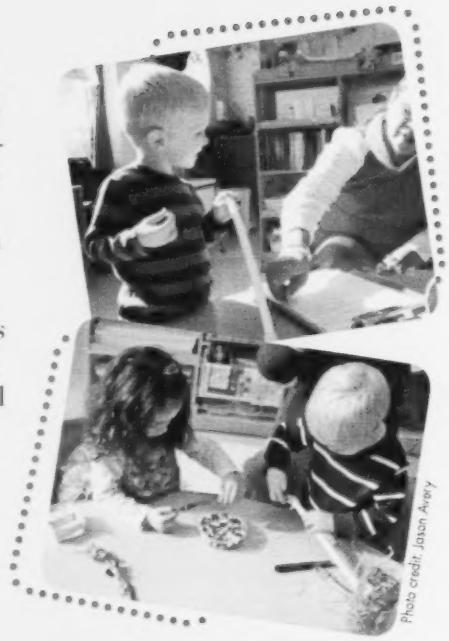
Photo credit: Jason Avery

As the educator continues to observe, the child enjoys sending beads down the pipe and the educator notes: "Miles joyfully explores the combination of beads and pipes. He is able to peer down the length of the tube and see the bead he has inserted. He hears it skitter its way along the pipe" (Avery, Callaghan & Wien, forthcoming).

A second step in creating documentation is the willingness to share what we have noted and our curiosities with others. Educators "go public", willing to show others their documentation and to be interested in others' responses to it. We hold onto this stance of curiosity. What does this experience mean to this child? To other children? To parents/caregivers? To other educators? As we widen our frame of reference for reflecting on experiences, and share our practice with children, families, and colleagues, we strengthen partnerships, and open ourselves to new understandings.

Alongside these developing interests, educators develop visual literacy skills, gaining understanding of how the eye reads information. Removing clutter, selecting just the images that show what we are noticing, and offering documentation in amounts that can be absorbed by children, or parents/caregivers, visitors, and colleagues takes considerable practice. Educators grasp that documentation for children is highly focused with child-friendly text. For parents and visitors, documentation may be at adult height, with expanded text and commentary.

A leap in understanding occurs when educators grasp that documentation is more than a record or retelling of an experience that shows what children said and did – though this is indeed the starting point. Documentation offers insight into children's thinking, feeling, and worldview. When we make their ideas and working theories about the world visible to others, we may then study those views with others to broaden our perspectives and our responsiveness. With Miles, we see a child delighted by his discoveries about beads coursing down a pipe and his educator notes: "there is something of beauty in setting a thing in motion and watching it go" (Avery, Callaghan & Wien, forthcoming).

It is when we have made children's thoughts, feelings, and values visible that we can study the meaning of events to children, offering our thoughts collaboratively so that our own understanding widens, deepens, and takes in multiple perspectives. This process of group study of educators' attempts to make children's thinking and feeling visible is what makes documentation pedagogical. Documentation becomes pedagogical because the group study of documentation teaches educators about ways that children learn, and

ways that adults read children's learning. Our intent is to deepen empathy, to construct ethical relationships (Bath, 2012; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2006; Rinaldi, 2006).

What will we make of pedagogical documentation in Ontario? What will it become in our minds, hearts and hands, as we strengthen partnerships with families, value diversity and inclusion of all and support children's right to an empathetic childhood in which educators are willing to look at the meaning of life for our youngest citizens?

Questions to Ask When Studying Documentation

- What are we trying to understand? What are we asking pedagogical documentation to help us look for?
- What do we see when we look closely and attentively at the documentation?
- What questions does this looking raise for us? What do we wonder about?
- What are our working theories about what we see?
- What does the documentation reveal about children's working theories, feelings, attachments and interests?

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Everyone Is Welcome: Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care

Written by Dr. Kathryn Underwood

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Supporting all children to fully participate in their communities requires high quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) experiences. High quality inclusive ECEC programs have three key components: they are accessible to all children and their families; they are designed and carried out with consideration for the unique needs of each child; and they include ongoing evaluation of programs to ensure full participation (Underwood & Frankel, 2012). In high quality ECEC programs all children have opportunities to develop their language, social, physical and cognitive abilities. Inclusive early education is not just about placement in a program, but also active participation in social interactions and the development of children's abilities and skills. Children at a range of developmental levels, including children identified with special needs in the ECEC service system, should be welcomed as valued members of the community by supporting active participation in all early childhood settings (Underwood, Valeo & Wood, 2012).

Access

Early Childhood Education and Care programs are inclusive when they have:

- **Policies that promote inclusion**
- **Leadership that supports inclusion**
- **Staff who believe in inclusion**

In order for all children to fully participate in education, care and community, they must have equitable access to programs. Early childhood education and care programs should have an inclusion policy that states the anti-discriminatory policies for enrolment,

children's behaviour, and programming in the centre. Service agencies must also have access to the supports they need to meet all children's needs. In many settings, resource consultants are available to support staff in inclusion efforts.

For programs that do not have a regular resource consultant, partnerships with other agencies and early intervention programs can provide resource teachers, specialists, community-based professionals, funding and support for parent-educator partnerships. Early intervention and resource consultants can build a relationship with ECEC staff that results in problem solving between all stakeholders within the child care system including with families (Buysee & Hollingsworth, 2009; Frankel & Underwood, 2011; Guralnick, 2011). As an example, these external support staff might provide a parallel program, such as speech and language intervention, and a child care centre can help the family to monitor the child's development, and provide opportunities for social participation using language.

The relationships across services and professionals should be coordinated and collaborative. The service sectors that provide these supports include health, education, social services, and care services. These teams of professionals can support assessment, planning, design of adaptations and accommodations, and program evaluation. As an example, a family physician can refer a child who has difficulty with social interaction to a drop-in at an Ontario Early Years Centre where there are opportunities for social interactions with other children.

Design and Implementation

Programs are inclusive when:

- **The program is designed to meet the needs of all children and families (universal design)**
- **Planning is individualized and the goal of participation is explicit**
- **Early intervention goals for the child are accommodated and embedded within the program (differentiation)**

Physical resources that are important for inclusive practice include an accessible environment that provides adaptive materials, specialized equipment and a well-planned layout. Many of the materials and environments that are identified in high quality early childhood education overall are consistent with high quality inclusion (Irwin, Lero & Brophy, 2004; Buysee & Hollingsworth, 2009). Staff in ECEC programs can use the range of materials they have for multi-age programs to adapt activities for all children. For example, large pencils for young children work well for older children who have fine motor difficulties. Programs that are able to provide both quiet and active areas are good for children with a range of attention and sensory needs. Programs that respect the natural pace of each child's development and the family context are also inclusive (Frankel & Underwood, 2012).

Individualized planning should be documented so that it can then be shared with parents, specialists and the child themselves to ensure it meets the child's needs (Savaria, Underwood & Sinclair, 2011). Development of an Individualised Program Plan (IPP),

or an equivalent documentation of individual approaches, will ensure intentional planning within the program and will help with information sharing amongst professionals, agencies and with families.

For some families, children are accessing multiple services. This can mean that multiple assessments are conducted, and families are asked to support planning with each service. The IPP can record activities and routines in the program from the perspective of the child, and can be shared with other professionals with the permission of the family. Most importantly the goals of the IPP should focus on participation rather than on what is "normal". This means that the child should have opportunities to be physically active, have fun, and make friends (Rosenbaum & Gorter, 2011). The IPP may also have identified resources, so it is important to work with the family to coordinate supports and programming (Janus, Lefort, Cameron & Kopechanski, 2007; Irwin, Brophy & Lero, 2004).

The IPP should also include any therapeutic goals that are identified in other programs in which the child participates. Embedding early intervention strategies into child care, family support programs, and family routines, supports the transfer of developmental skills across contexts (Guralnick, 2011; Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi & Shelton, 2004). The IPP should outline any additional staffing, communication strategies, equipment, and ratios or grouping that need to be adapted, along with funding that is associated with supports and program adaptations (Frankel & Underwood, 2012). Funding for supports can be identified with the support of municipal early intervention and resource programs and other service providers funded through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (Underwood, 2012).

Monitoring and Assessment

Children and families continue to be included when:

- **Professionals respond to developmental changes in children and changes in family life**
- **Programs are flexible, responsive and use up-to-date information to plan and make decisions**
- **There is a smooth transition from early childhood to school**

A critical factor in high quality inclusive settings is ongoing monitoring of the success of the program. As children grow and develop, and as the group of children in the community changes, the program must adapt. Therefore, ECEC programs need to monitor the changing needs of children, their families, and communities, as well as new information they gain through monitoring both the children and the program. Knowledge of children's individual development through informal observation and more formal assessment activities (carried out by the appropriate professional),

matched with environmental assessments of program activities and spaces, is critical in inclusive early childhood programming. Early childhood programs also support families with referrals for diagnostic assessment. The value of a range of assessment and monitoring practices over time is that as more children participate and the ECEC programs gain knowledge about adapting programs and making the physical space and equipment accessible for a wider range of children (Cross et al., 2004).

In order for families and ECEC providers to have the supports they need, they must be aware of the supports that are available. Families gain awareness of programs through personal networks (friends and family), referrals and advertising (Underwood & Killoran, 2012). ECEC providers are part of a network of professionals, and can provide referrals and information about the range of programs in their community. In order to be knowledgeable about services, ECEC providers need to be active in their professional networks.

Significant changes have taken place over the last decade in how and where we deliver supports to children identified as having special needs and their families. Also, changes in other programs can affect early childhood service delivery, for example as Full-Day Kindergarten is implemented. It is important that ECEC providers are able to communicate with school staff to ensure a good transition as children with special education needs spend more time in schools.

Early childhood programs that are effective at monitoring and assessment are well positioned to support families and children as they transition to school. Transitions to school are a critical time for all children, but research suggests that transition issues are much more pronounced for children with identified special needs than other children (Janus et al., 2007; Lloyd, Irwin & Hertzman, 2009). In order to support children with special educational needs transitioning into schools, it is important to coordinate the sharing of information among early childhood services, schools and parents. The best transition practices are those that come before school starts, for example home visits by school staff and team meetings including the professionals and parents who know the child best (Janus et al., 2007). The IPP is very helpful at this stage because parents or professionals can use it to share information with the school and reduce the need for individual assessments to be repeated. Further, the IPP can support ongoing monitoring and consistency of goals through the transition period. Early childhood educators and resource consultants are an important source of information between early childhood and school systems when different attitudes and overall goals shift (Underwood & Langford, 2011). Perhaps most importantly, there needs to be a clear transfer of responsibility from early childhood professionals to school-based supports so that parents can navigate the differences in roles from one system to another.

Beyond the Practices:

Language and understanding of disability

There are many strategies that will help to support children in early childhood settings. However, research suggests that one of the most critical aspects of effective inclusion practices is the attitude of practitioners (Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi & Shelton, 2004; Ostrosky, M. M., Laumann, B. M. & Hsieh, W., 2006; Purdue, 2009).

In particular, educators' beliefs about disability, and ability, have been linked to their overall beliefs about learning and higher quality educational practice (Jordon, Glenn & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; McGhie-Richmond, Underwood & Jordan, 2007). Cross, Traub,

Hutter-Pishgahi & Shelton (2004) found that educators' attitudes about inclusion improved with successes and experience in working in universal programs with quality inclusion practices. This is also evident with parents who may hold negative attitudes toward inclusion after having an experience where their child does not get adequate support or has a negative social experience (Start et al., 2011). But when parents and educators have a positive experience with inclusion they are more likely to describe a positive attitude toward inclusion.

Much of what we know about attitudes toward disability has emerged from changing theoretical understanding of disability. Disability is now defined as the interaction between the individual and their environment; it is not solely a characteristic of the child. Disability is a restriction of functioning, activities or participation as a result of barriers in the environment or a lack of facilitators for participation (WHO & UNICEF, 2012). Understanding the social experience of disability allows those working in early childhood education and care environments to consider that it is not a diagnosis that defines disability, but the degree to which we are meeting the needs of each child – either facilitating their development, or creating barriers. It is important to understand disability theory because research tells us that educators who believe that all children have a right to participation are more likely to find ways to reduce barriers, and to understand how each child learns. These educators tend to be better at supporting all children in their programs, regardless of diagnosis (DEC/NAEYC, 2009; Ostrosky, M. M., Laumann, B. M. & Hsieh, W., 2006; Purdue, 2009; Underwood, Valeo & Wood, 2012).

Using the term disability aligns educators and those working with young children with an international movement for inclusion (DEC/NAEYC, 2009; WHO & UNICEF, 2012). Internationally, education systems have not adopted this language that addresses the systemic, attitudinal and access issues that are important in understanding inclusive environments. Having language to describe these experiences is important so that we can talk about planning early childhood programs and other services, but the World Health Organization and UNICEF recognize that most children with disabilities do not think

of themselves as disabled – or as having special needs. It is important when talking about children experiencing disability to remember the goal of full participation for all children in education, care, and community (WHO & UNICEF, 2012).

Questions for Reflection

1. Do children with a range of individual characteristics feel welcomed and comfortable to attend your program?
2. In what ways does your program respond to the individual capabilities of the children in the program?
3. What are you doing to assess the program to ensure barriers are reduced for children and families and that you facilitate full participation in the program?
4. Do you have collaborative partnerships with other organizations in order to support all children?
5. What information about individual children is recorded; is this information necessary to support inclusion; and how is this information shared among parents, staff who are responsible for the child and with other agencies who are supporting the child and their family?

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